

WASHINGTON, DC -- Congresswoman Linda Sánchez (D-Lakewood) made the following remarks during debate today on the floor of the House of Representatives on H.R. 1512, the SCAAP Reimbursement Protection Act of 2007. Congresswoman Sánchez re-introduced the legislation last year, which was unanimously approved by the House Judiciary Committee in October.

"Thank you, Mr. Chair,

"Immigration is probably the signature federal policy issue. Try as they might, states simply can't fix failures in federal immigration policy on their own. But when we fall down on the jobs, states, cities, and counties bear the burden for an immigration system that simply doesn't work.

"While Congress is working on a comprehensive solution to our broken immigration system, we must not forget about the local governments who are paying an extremely high cost as a result of our inaction.

"In 1994, Congress passed the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP) to reimburse states and localities for the arrest, incarceration and transportation costs associated with criminal aliens — averting a tidal wave of expenses that could have overwhelmed those state and local budgets.

"However, in 2003, the Department of Justice reinterpreted the SCAAP statute and caused a drastic drop in every state's reimbursement. Now states no longer receive reimbursements unless 1) the criminal alien is convicted of a felony or two misdemeanors; and 2) the arrest and conviction occurred in the same year. To add insult to injury, President Bush has zeroed out SCAAP in his budget proposals for the last six years.

"This means that State and local governments are left to pick up the tab. Every dollar reduction in SCAAP reimbursements is one less dollar law enforcement agencies have to hire new officers, provide essential training, make critical equipment purchases, and detain other — perhaps more violent — inmates.

"Following the SCAAP funding cuts in 2003, the LA County Sheriff's Department implemented a new "early release" policy for inmates convicted of misdemeanors. This means the neighborhoods I represent in Southern California are at risk. Sadly, these communities are not alone."